

BENJAMIN

CHARLES

GEORGE G.

1840

22 34
L E T T E R

TO

BENJAMIN GOLDING, M.D.,

DIRECTOR

OF THE

CHARING CROSS HOSPITAL.

BY

GEORGE G. SIGMOND, M.D., F. S. A., F. L. S.,

Physician to the Charing Cross Hospital.

c

THOMS, WARWICK SQUARE.

A
L E T T E R
TO
BENJAMIN GOLDING, M.D.

SIR,

Is it not your own fault that you cannot claim one of the proudest rights to the respect and esteem of society? You, an individual unknown to the medical profession and to the public, boldly undertook to be the principal founder and director of a hospital. What your inducements were I will not now enquire. I think the statements I am about to make will prove that it was not from a spark of benevolent feeling, nor from that generous sympathy which Heaven has planted in the bosom of some men for great and noble purposes. As the builder of a hospital you have succeeded—as a director you have miserably failed, and you have excited the most hostile feelings against yourself, as well by your total incapacity and by your conduct towards the poor, as by your base ingratitude to those colleagues who had paid you a personal tribute of respect as the Founder of the Hospital, who had given the medical character to your institution, to whose exertions you were indebted for the good reputation it had acquired, and who had never attempted to interfere with your arrangements. Without them, how frail were the reeds upon which you leant! Your only coadjutors were your Honorary Secretary, Mr. Robertson, and Dr. Shearman, from whom but little was to be expected. For though the first devoted the little leisure time he could abstract from his duties as clerk in a public office to the writing of those importunate letters which obtain from the benevolent rich their attention and their compassion, yet his only recommendation was his knowledge of the forms in which communications were to be made, and the minutes and reports drawn up. Dr. Shearman

could do little more than act as your Treasurer, and the height of his ambition appears to have been to become a Physician to a hospital at a period of life when most men feel it incumbent upon them to retire from their professional duties. What these persons may have lacked in power to assist you they have compensated for by their zeal, their assiduity, and by that which most you prize—their subserviency.

Are you not most deeply indebted to your colleagues not only for their medical assistance, but also that they sustained a share of that unpopularity which necessarily attended the peculiar system which you pursued to obtain funds—I mean the system of puffing? No individual ever more thoroughly understood the manner in which money is to be extracted from the pockets of the rich. Would to heavens you had equally well understood how it might be employed to make happy the poor. You were fully acquainted with the benevolence of the British public. You knew how to take advantage of its virtues and its failings. You set an example to institution-founders which others at a humble distance have attempted to follow, but none have been so successful. The industry and the ingenuity which marked your career were well rewarded. A rich harvest followed a succession of sermons, of bazaars, of fancy fairs, of musical festivals, which rushed upon each other with a rapidity as astonishing as was the effect produced. And with a heavy purse and a light heart you were enabled to emerge from an obscure place in Villiers' Street, where, with the humility of an Infirmary, your annual statements told the world you had relieved thousands. To crown your glory, a prince of the royal blood, invited by your colleague, Mr. Pettigrew, benevolently laid the foundation of an edifice which now forms one of the hospitals of the metropolis.

The Institution thus founded might have become a blessing to the poor, but, if you are to remain the Director, I fear it will be but a bye-word and a mockery. I know that it would be impossible, under its present circumstances, to realise one-half of the magnificent promises that are blazoned forth in your prospectuses. The combination of all that could be useful to the sick and to the infirm is most liberally proclaimed. In the sermons from the pulpits your promises were reiterated, and both corporeal and spiritual relief were pronounced to be part and portion of your views. Many were the schemes that issued from your imagination that can never be carried into effect. Still attention, kindness, and assiduity might have done much more than has yet been attempted. During the first year of your career as Director, I felt it my duty to make every allowance for your inexperience and for the multiplicity of affairs which pressed upon your attention; and even for a much longer period I was prepared to find that difficulties would

arise in a young establishment, that obstacles would present themselves, that from the novelty of your empire, and the necessary husbanding of your funds, you might be compelled to make various sacrifices, relinquish some of your magnificent ideas, and even curtail the promised blessings of your paternal sway. My colleague and I, whenever opportunity presented itself, did ample justice to your labours, and gave our mite of encouragement at every step: we admitted, as an excuse,

“Res dura, et regni novitas me talia cogunt.”

Although I had occasionally to make complaints of the drugs, of the state of the beds, and of other arrangements, I did it as seldom as possible, and never urged them with that anxiety which I have been compelled to do for the last eight months. It was in the month of November last I plainly saw that all hopes of obtaining any attention from you were totally blighted. You had so accustomed yourself to bazaars and festivals that you could not exist without one. Instead of husbanding your resources, of patiently waiting the results of public benevolence, or relying upon the assistance of others whose individual influence might be of greater extent than your own, and which would have attended upon a proper management of your hospital,—instead of giving character to it as a medical and surgical establishment,—you completely and entirely abandoned the charge you had undertaken. It was in vain to attempt to address you. Your heart and soul were elsewhere. You again embarked in one of your splendid schemes, a musical festival, which was to produce thousands. You must yourself encounter and drag others into responsibility. You must rush into a state of excitement which those who knew you not almost fancied derangement; whilst all your powers of being useful where most your aid was wanted were paralyzed. I will not blame you for wishing to increase the funds of the Hospital, but I will complain of your not employing them nobly, generously, and honourably. They were given for the poor—let the poor enjoy them. Of the complete abandonment of all your duties I had every right to complain; but when to this were superadded a heartless inattention to the wants of the poor, an avaricious and deplorable denial of that which was indispensably necessary for carrying on the Hospital, when every attempt to complain was met with an intolerable levity and unfeeling replies, when the commonest observation was treated as a sneer or an insinuation, I feel I did my duty in loudly, anxiously, and earnestly calling for that which ought to exist in every institution, A WEEKLY BOARD OF MANAGERS.

I have to remind you, Sir, that Mr. Pettigrew and myself had for a long time stated that the Hospital was so mismanaged that we were anxious to have a proper Committee appointed. We urged this for some time. We were at length (only the 16th July last) told that a special meeting was only to be held upon a requisition signed by six of the Governors, and, finding that there was an annual meeting of Governors about to take place, we informed the Secretary we would refer to that meeting our complaints.

This meeting, instead of taking place, as the laws of the charity direct, in the spring of the year, was, doubtless for reasons well known to yourself, summoned for the first of August, a season when it was impossible to collect the real benefactors of the Hospital. At that meeting you, Sir, in order to avoid bringing forward the objects we had proposed, had the effrontery and the indelicacy to nominate a Committee, to give in a paper stating who the individuals were to be who were to take these subjects into consideration and to sit in judgment upon your management of the Hospital. This list contained the names of Governors created by yourself and Mr. Robertson, of the tradesmen of the Hospital, and of your own connection, nay even, it appears, your own brother-in-law. I rose to object to one, Mr. Green of Tothill-fields, the Druggist who chiefly supplies the Hospital. It was in vain I found; he positively declared he would be on the Committee, and as may be imagined he sat with "unabashed front" at every meeting, nay even when his own drugs were to have been enquired into, and this necessarily neutralized my observations on a subject of the deepest importance. I found that, if to obtain any prospect of reforming the Hospital, I must submit with as good a grace as I could to the selection made by you. I saw all my efforts there would be unavailing, but I knew that, happen what would, the public might at last be appealed to, and then I felt that your misrule must cease, and that the Governors and Subscribers would be compelled to take the management of the Hospital into their own hands. I knew but little of the members of the Committee, but there was one source, I thought, of hope, there was a clergyman of the Church of England in the chair. I did not know at that time that you had nominated him a Governor, nor did I think that he might look to be one day the Chaplain of the Charing Cross Hospital. I only saw in Mr. Worthington a Minister of that Gospel which teaches good-will to all mankind. I expected the mildness, the gentle spirit, and the meekness which characterize the pastors of the church. I thought he would have listened "more in sorrow than in anger" to the dissensions of which he had heard. In this I was indeed disappointed. So violent a partisan I have never encountered in a chair-

man, nor one so little anxious to explain away any hostile observation, or to calm the irritated feelings; but this I would have little regarded had I found him the zealous advocate of the poor. I vainly imagined that the very instant he heard a single murmur against the treatment of the suffering poor,—that even a whisper from one of the medical officers breathing the slightest charge of carelessness, of indifference, on the part of the Director towards those committed to his charge,—would have arrested his earnest attention,—that, although he might think the charge unjust, he would patiently, anxiously, earnestly have sifted every particular,—that he would not have abandoned his situation until he had summoned before him the servants of the Hospital, every individual from whom he could have obtained the least intelligence,—that he would with patient industry have enquired, until he had calmly and dispassionately arrived at the conclusion that the Hospital was really a blessing to the poor, that the character of the Director was pure, upright, and unblemished.

I shall now, Sir, recal to your recollection the proceedings which took place before your Committee, and will state, for your mature judgment, the facts which I brought before them, and which they, in the plenitude of their wisdom, pronounced “frivolous,” which they, with a conscientious love of truth, refused to enquire into, because you daringly called them unworthy their consideration. The first complaint which I ventured to urge to their unwilling ears was your total neglect of caution in the employment of proper persons in your establishment. The first individual on whom my censure fell was the one whose duty it was to remain at the entrance-hall, to receive the unfortunate persons who came to claim relief and assistance. Upon this person devolved a most important office. He it was who assisted at the threshold the unlucky individual, who, perhaps, had just encountered some frightful accident. It was his care to watch over him until the arrival of the House-Surgeon, to see him cautiously taken into the ward, and placed under the most favourable circumstances. It is scarcely credible that you should have nominated to such a station a most notorious drunkard. To those who know how gentle should be the treatment, how delicate the attention, shown where a fractured limb or where a concussion has taken place, it must be a matter of the deepest regret that you, knowing the man’s propensities, his evil habits, should, notwithstanding every remonstrance that was made, notwithstanding even the Pupils who were loud and urgent in their complaints, should have continued this man in office until his death, which, most fortunately for your suffering patients, occurred about a month before the meeting of your Committee. When this neglect of your duty was brought before your Committee,

you did not attempt to deny or palliate it; the answer which you judged necessary to satisfy the minds of those present was, it was very true. The man was now dead; he some how or other was a great favourite, and, as he had been so long in the Hospital, you did not like to get rid of him. But, granting that this man's conduct was of little consequence to the sick inmates of your house, such could not be the case with those engaged to nurse the sick; and I firmly believe that, with the exception of a Sister in each of the wards, never were such a set of persons entrusted with one of the most sacred duties that we are called upon in the hours of sickness, sorrow, and distress, to perform one for the other. It is to your culpable inattention I attribute the employment of some of the most abandoned characters that ever dishonoured society as nurses of the sick. Intoxication in its worst form was no check upon engaging these people. The worst profligates, notorious thieves, self-attempted suicides, succeeded one upon the other with the most fearful rapidity.

I did mention cases to your Committee, and for their sakes most fervently do I hope that to none of them such aggravated sorrow may occur. Possibly they, in the midst of health and untortured by disease, may think lightly of that which I have seen; but when the burning temples beat, when the parched lips quiver, when the aching limb finds no rest, may none of them know the sad affliction of having an attendant so lost to every sense of decency, so abandoned to the worst of habits, as to be incapable of answering the questions of the enquiring Physician, and whose only power it is to render the last sighs of parting life more wretched than disease had made them.

I mentioned a case to your Committee. It called forth no commiseration; it excited no sympathy; it was too frivolous for a Minister of the Gospel to enquire into; no nurses were called to investigate if such a case could have ever occurred; no hope was expressed that such a statement might be exaggerated; no gentle hint was given to you, the Director, to guard against similar calamities. No, you rose and very cavalierly stated that it was scarcely your province to hire the nurses; you knew little about it. Yet, as a Director of a Hospital you should have known that your nurses were drunkards, that they were taken because they could be cheaply procured—no question as to character: one was epileptic, another carried off the clothes of her suffering co-mates of misery; another, who had attempted to poison herself, followed me round the wards almost incapable of walking, and for two successive days she was in a state of drunkenness—and this your Committee call frivolous! Had there been a Board of Governors, this ill-placed responsibility would have been removed from your shoulders, and I should have been spared the melancholy tones of voice in which my

attention was called by some suffering being, who, led by your loudly-expressed promises, sought refuge from her grief within your walls. Your Committee deemed my complaints of the inefficiency of the instruments usually employed in the Hospital frivolous; yet, Sir, if to the patient they were frivolous, to my character they were of the deepest importance. When an individual had either by accident or by design swallowed poison and came under my treatment, my first invariable direction to my House pupil was the use of the stomach-pump; yet, when was it ever found in order? when was it ever in such a state as to be used? Have I not stated before your Committee that it never was ready? and your answer, and that of your friends upon that memorable Committee, was, "the stomach-pump may always be found in any druggist's shop;" and yet it was from the druggist's shop that my last patient came for that instrument, which, from your neglect, was unserviceable. I should have thought that my remonstrance would have been attended to; and yet I learn that, even since my services as Physician to your Hospital have been dispensed with, a case of poisoning was brought to your Establishment, but the stomach-pump was precisely as I had described it, unfit for use. The next point which called for my reprobation was one I submit no body of men could deem frivolous. I stated that I had for a considerable length of time loudly exclaimed against the cheap trash which, under the name of physic, the poor were compelled to swallow, of the wretched economy which could allow the vilest compounds to be substituted for wholesome drugs, which could forbid the employment of the better class of medicine. I know that the great majority of subscribers to Hospitals feel an honest pride in the reflection that the poor, through their means, have medical attendants as experienced, relief as certain, and medicines as efficacious as they themselves can procure when pain and disease afflict them; but I have the melancholy task of telling the Subscribers to the Charing Cross Hospital that the Director not only will not allow expensive medicines, but that he unblushingly advocates the doctrine of "cheap physic for the poor." He knows not the golden maxim of "tuto cito et jucunde;" for he will not permit even a tincture of an aperient medicine, without which many diseases cannot be alleviated. The poor may be griped, what cares he?—a penny may be saved. He forgets, or will not know, that in disorders the stomach sympathises with the whole system; and that, though it may in health not require a gentle stimulus, it is indispensable in disease. No medicine that is expensive is permitted in the laboratory; not even castor-oil, though now perhaps, as it is fallen in price, your generous feeling may be awakened—no scammony, one of the most useful articles for children; it is too dear. Was cascarrilla,

or calumba, or any mild but expensive bark admitted?—no, the cheap and bitter quassia only was to be allowed. Cinchona occasionally, and sarsaparilla always, called forth some objection from you, Sir, when I felt it my duty to prescribe it. I said that I have repeatedly prescribed medicines which had been refused to be made up by the dispenser, who had told me that he was authorized by the Director only to have furnished the cheapest drugs. I spoke too of the miserable manner in which they were kept, of their coarseness, of the state of decay in which many of them were, that they were so bad that I could not exhibit them to the pupils even as the common specimen of the medicines of the druggists' shops, and that the young gentlemen attended my lectures actually brought preparations to the Hospital that they might show me the sad inferiority of those we were administering to the poor. In vain I addressed your Committee; their ears were deaf to every thing but praise of you, of Dr. Shearman, and of Mr. Robertson. They could cheer every thing that could flatter your vanity; they could not brook the slightest doubt of your philanthropy. They did not examine a single witness against the truth of my assertions; but, had they even glanced upon the amount paid to the druggists for a year, they must have seen how inadequate it was to supply a large number of persons with good and wholesome physic. No, Sir, the gentlemen before whom you spoke came only with an intention of driving Mr. Pettigrew and myself from the Hospital, that you might remain sole monarch, lord, and master; but, Sir, the reply you made to my observation was sufficient, in my opinion, to have awakened some feeling against you. I think, as I took note of your words, I can repeat them for your recollection:---“I do not deny, but it was in conversation, that I have said to Dr. Sigmond that I would not allow the palate of the coal-heaver to be tickled with delicacies;” and to this you added, “I do not know what Dr. Sigmond prescribes to the duchesses he attends; but this I know, that here we need not be so nice.” Such words I must tell you appear to me, Sir, cold-hearted and unfeeling, unworthy a self-constituted guardian of the poor; but such was the language you could boldly use before eight men, one of them a clergyman. I looked around me. I did expect some mark of indignation would have broken forth—I did not imagine that among men who had ever heard the Christian doctrine, “Do unto others as you would they should do unto you,” such a declaration would have been allowed to pass unheeded. I saw, however, the same complacent smile sat on your Chairman's countenance. From that moment I felt how useless it was to waste my time. I saw that your friends were too subservient to your views to attend to my protest, that they could not understand the sensations that your conduct and your

words had inspired within me, and that the slightest hope of correcting your mismanagement, and of reform, was at an end.

It is my duty to give my testimony to the justice and accuracy of the charges and complaints urged before the Committee by my colleague, Mr. Pettigrew. He completely substantiated his statements as to the great deficiency of bandages of every description, the want of various instruments required to be in constant readiness in all Hospitals, and truly and forcibly depicted the melancholy condition of the inmates, and the harsh treatment they had received at your hands. His observations, also, as to the condition of the beds and the inferiority of the diet, I can most amply corroborate. The complaints of the patients on those points have been frequent and uniform.

In making these complaints before your Committee, I distinctly stated that I did not wish these to be considered as charges against you, but that, as it was the first opportunity I had ever enjoyed of meeting any of the Governors, I was most anxious they should take into their hands the future regulation of the Institution and relieve you from a heavy weight of responsibility. Judge, Sir, what was my surprise. Instead of learning that my suggestions would be considered, that the circumstances would be investigated, I received a letter from your Secretary simply announcing to me the fact that the Committee had thought proper to dispense with my services as Physician to the Institution. It was not until several days after I learnt that they had assigned certain reasons for it. Having received my appointment from the Governors at large, it is only their decision upon my dismissal I am called upon to obey; still, as I wrote to the Secretary that I could not associate with Dr. Golding, Dr. Shearman, or Mr. Howship, and had made such a declaration before the Committee, I have not the slightest regret that I no longer am to act with them; but, Sir, I think it was a duty you owed to your colleague, not only of two years' standing at your Hospital but of eight more years at your Infirmary in Villiers Street, to have stated to your Committee that a dismissal is the harshest measure that could have been pursued, that some misconduct on my part might be inferred by those unacquainted with the circumstances, and that it would at any rate have been more in unison with the feelings of gentlemen that my previous resignation should have been accepted.

Sir, I am sorry to say that it does not appear to have been your wish that your Committee should have acted with that spirit of moderation and of feeling which ought to characterize all the proceedings of those who assume to govern a charitable institution. It would seem as if their only anxiety was to get rid of Mr. Pettigrew and myself, as entertaining opinions adverse to yours; and from the report

which lies at your Hospital, and which must become subject of further enquiry, that it was your desire to lessen the respect it has been my good fortune to obtain, and even to calumniate my character, for in no other view can I see the statements that are put forth, and which are completely at variance with truth.

Of the transaction between Mr. Pettigrew and Mr. Howship I need say but little, for it has been amply explained and is before the public; and it is before that tribunal which it ought to have been, instead of a Committee of your Governors—it is before the Council of the College of Surgeons. That I supported Mr. Pettigrew through a most arduous task, and before a tribunal which almost amounted to an inquisition, partial in the extreme, I most gladly acknowledge. Why I was not made acquainted with the transaction, when you, Dr. Shearman, and Mr. Robertson were fully aware of it for many months, I know not; but I never could associate with you and with those gentlemen when I find you on the most intimate terms of friendship and regard, accepting a tribute of respect from him in the shape of a bust, when you believed him to be guilty of an unjustifiable action, relative to which you were about to bring him to a trial. It had been mentioned to me two years ago, I felt it my duty to tell you so; but you positively denied that such a rumour had met your ears. For months it was concealed from me; and then how was it first noticed?—a dark and mysterious hint was thrown out, an abstract question brought forward to entrap me into an opinion. From the month of November until May you were silent upon this important subject, which would still have been unknown had not Mr. Pettigrew, seeing the Hospital could not go on under your sole management, wished to see it united with the King's College. This was the head and front of his offending. This led you to the series of difficulties in which you are now involved.

In the report drawn up, which abounds with that phraseology for which your earlier prospectuses are remarkable, “the promotion of the benevolent objects of the charity,” your Committee talk of the moral impropriety of the transaction.

Sir, there are other points that deserve, in my opinion, this character; I will mention one which, as it is more immediately connected with the interests of the charity, is of more importance to it, and shows that even self-interest has crossed your mind. Let me refer you to a comfortable commodious dwelling-house next to the Hospital, which has been untenanted ever since its building. On looking back to one of the meetings of your quarterly Committee I find you are actually invited to take possession of this comfortable and commodious house. I have learnt it has been fitted up. Probably some sneers and insinuations as to the moral propriety of your inhabiting it

have for the present, I trust for ever, induced you to relinquish your intention; but why is it not let? it looks too like a job to be as it now is—going to decay. Nor am I quite satisfied as to the moral propriety of your nominating whom you please as Governors, giving individuals power and privileges equal to those who subscribe forty-guineas, and who become of course grateful to their benefactor. At the very last quarterly meeting, your usual triumvirate and one other person present, you elected two Governors, one a Musical Amateur, no doubt introduced for the purpose of becoming a nominee upon this notable Committee, the other a reporter of a public newspaper, who of course is bound to see every thing in a favourable light. Whatever your boast may be of your being a gratuitous officer, remember how great is your patronage. You have given in the hospital every appointment. How large are the sums of money that have passed unchecked through the hands of yourself and your two friends, by which your power has been cemented? How large is the connection you have been enabled to form in the parish of St. Martins? Indeed many are the sources I could point out of reward to yourself, some of which hereafter may become subjects of enquiry. There is one point mentioned in the report which I am surprised you should not instantly have set forth in its proper light, as it would have saved possibly some legal enquiry, as I believe it to be defamatory. It is said, and in strong language, that I ought to have offered to return my fees for my lectures before I gave in my resignation, which I did some time since, as Professor in your school. You know that this under any circumstances is somewhat ridiculous. No Lecturer ever did so. I completed my course, and, three months before that completion, I gave the usual notice. So far from being called on to return the fees, I am entitled by your laws to receive from my Successor an equivalent sum, though, it may be remarked, the sum was too paltry to speak of. The charge would have been too contemptible for my notice had not your Committee, though they could not call it a moral impropriety, designated it unprofessional. The last charge they bring against me is that I negotiated with King's College in December last for a Professorship. You could have set them right on that subject; for you are aware that although invited by the Principal, at that time, I declined it, that I entered into no communication privately with the officers of the King's College, that the only letter I wrote to them was after my declaration that I had no confidence in you, and after I had expressed the distrust which I still entertain of your actions.

During the whole of my expression of my wish to obtain a board of Governors I was open and frank with you; and, when I found there was no hope of amendment, I looked with anxiety to King's College,

because there I knew I should find support, and that gentlemanly feeling without which no satisfactory intercourse can be carried on.

From you, Sir, there is no authority to appeal to. For although, by the laws of the Hospital, we should have a President, you have taken care that the vacancy made in 1828 by the resignation of the Marquis of Anglesea should not be filled up. You have kept in your own hands all the power: the Governors are, many of them, of your own nomination, and I know the difficulty there is of bringing the real benefactors of the Hospital together. Still I must hope your dominion is at an end; the public feeling will prevent your future misrule.

There are many other points which, as this subject is likely to provoke some discussion, may hereafter be detailed. I have only brought forward a few of those in which I think the Subscribers of the Hospital must take an interest. Let it be remembered, Sir, that I stated them not as recriminations, nor did I follow your example, of bringing forward a charge which you hoped would so influence Mr. Pettigrew's feelings that he would shrink from the duty he owed to the public. He, however, fearlessly and wisely threw himself upon the profession. They have seen how he has been persecuted, how malignantly he has been attacked, and how treacherously he was dragged before your Committee, and some of its members have expressed to me their satisfaction that I would not allow him to be trampled upon, without giving him that assistance so due to him. If my conduct on that occasion has offended you I am glad of it, as it has afforded me that opportunity which I eagerly embraced of exhibiting the rottenness of the system you have pursued at the Charing Cross Hospital. You have given me a triumph which I am persuaded you little dreamt that you would be the cause of my enjoying. I have felt the kindest, the warmest sympathy from members of my profession, many of them unknown to me, who have manifested an unlooked-for friendship, and have shown that, whatever your malice may have done, they can appreciate good intentions and straightforward motives.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

G. G. SIGMOND.

DOVER STREET,
Sept. 12, 1836.







